



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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MULTIPLE AGENCIES CONDUCT SUCCESSFUL SEASON OF MARIJUANA ERADICATION IN THE TONTO NATIONAL FOREST

PHOENIX – Multiple federal, state, and local agencies announce the successful eradication of 25,000 marijuana plants, with an approximate street value of \$50 million in processed marijuana, and the arrests of 17 individuals involved in several marijuana growing operations in the Tonto National Forest in Arizona. Federal charges have been filed against 18 individuals by the U.S. Attorney's Office. Seventeen individuals are currently in custody; one remains at large.

Five separate grow operations have been eradicated during this growing season, which usually last from May to October. The marijuana cultivation operations, located entirely on federal land in the Tonto National Forest and in Gila County, were also supported by supply routes in Maricopa County. The federal charges resulted from investigations conducted by the Gila County Narcotics Task Force (comprised of the Arizona Department of Public Safety and the Gila County Sheriff's Office), the U.S. Forest Service, the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Phoenix Police Department. A chart of those arrested and the charges filed against them is located below.

U.S. Attorney Daniel G. Knauss said of this operation, "These operations were successful due to the highest levels of cooperation from federal, state, and local officials. I applaud the exhausting efforts and professionalism exhibited by all these agencies as they strive to make our federal land safer for recreational use and prevent this drug from reaching the streets."

"These operations have been highly successful in reducing the number of plants grown on national forest lands in Arizona," stated Robin Poague, Assistant Special Agent in Charge for the Southwestern Region of the Forest Service.

Most of the cultivation areas were located in remote areas off normal trails in or near Maple Springs, Pigeon Springs, Promontory Butte, See Springs, Gold Creek Canyon and Hinton Canyons within the Tonto National Forest. Paid to cultivate and water the plants, many of the defendants would live and work in the gardens for several days up to several months at time. Others would re-supply them with materials to assist with plant cultivation as well as food and other supplies necessary for wilderness survival.

Gila County Sheriff John Armer stated that "The Gila County Narcotics Task Force is funded by a Byrne Grant administered through the Arizona Criminal Justice Commission and consists of the Gila County Sheriff's Office, Arizona Department of Public Safety and the Gila County Attorney's Office. Since 2003 the Task Force has eradicated in excess of 30 illegal Marijuana farms and a total of more than 200 thousand plants in the Gila County area. These seizures and eradications would have a street value as high as \$170,000,000."

"The Arizona Department of Public Safety is proud to be a part of the Gila County Narcotics Task Force. This successful eradication of a major drug operation will help keep Arizonans safe and will impact the flow of illegal drugs not just within the state but throughout the country," said Roger Vanderpool, Director of the Arizona Department of Public Safety.

"This eradication operation means that thousands of marijuana plants never made it into our neighborhoods, and millions of dirty dollars never made it into the drug trade," said DEA Special Agent in Charge Elizabeth W. Kempshall. "DEA will continue to support our law enforcement partners in attacking all aspects of drug trafficking and the violence that goes hand in hand with the distribution of these harmful substances."

"We are always pleased for the working relationship we have with all of our state and federal partners. We will continue to participate and do all we can to eradicate drug trafficking and the crimes associated with it from our community," added Executive Assistant Police Chief Tom Lannon of the Phoenix Police Department.

Defendant information from federal complaints and/or indictments:

| Name | Age | Status | Charges | Maximum Penalties |
|---|-----|-----------------|---|--|
| Javier Mendoza Cuevas CR-07-1178-PHX-SRB | 33 | US Citizen | 1 Count Conspiracy to Cultivate 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 846 and 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5) 2 Counts Cultivation of 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5) | 10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine 10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine |
| Jose Valencia Hernandez CR-07-1178-PHX-SRB | 23 | Mexican Citizen | 1 Count Conspiracy to Cultivate 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 846 and 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5) 1 Count Cultivation of 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5) | 10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine 10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine |
| Victorino Penaloza Cardenas CR-07-1135-PHX-NVW | 29 | Mexican Citizen | 1 Count Conspiracy to Cultivate 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 846 and 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5) 1 Count Cultivation of 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5) 1 Count Possession of Marijuana Plants with Intent to Distribute; 21 USC §§ 841(q)(1) and (b)(1)(C) | 10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine 10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine Up to 20 years and \$1M fine |

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| <p>Martin Martinez Coss CR-07-1135-PHX-NVW</p> | <p>34</p> | <p>Mexican Citizen</p> | <p>1 Count Conspiracy to Cultivate 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 846 and 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5)</p> <p>1 Count Cultivation of 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5)</p> <p>1 Count Possession of Marijuana Plants with Intent to Distribute; 21 USC §§ 841(q)(1) and (b)(1)(C)</p> | <p>10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine</p> <p>10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine</p> <p>Up to 20 years and \$1M fine</p> |
| <p>Jesus Hernandez Ley CR-07-1135-PHX-NVW</p> | <p>30</p> | <p>Mexican Citizen</p> | <p>1 Count Conspiracy to Cultivate 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 846 and 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5)</p> <p>1 Count Cultivation of 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5)</p> <p>1 Count Possession of Marijuana Plants with Intent to Distribute; 21 USC §§ 841(q)(1) and (b)(1)(C)</p> | <p>10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine</p> <p>10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine</p> <p>Up to 20 years and \$1M fine</p> |
| <p>Rigoberto Mendoza Guesar CR-07-1135-PHX-NVW</p> | <p>49</p> | <p>Mexican Citizen</p> | <p>1 Count Conspiracy to Cultivate 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 846 and 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5)</p> <p>1 Count Cultivation of 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5)</p> <p>1 Count Possession of a Firearm During and in Relation to a Controlled Substance Offense; 18 USC §924(c)(1)</p> | <p>10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine</p> <p>10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine</p> <p>5 years to Life consecutive to any other sentence and up to a \$250K fine</p> |

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| Filiberto Franco Chavez CR-07-1135-PHX-NVW | 28 | Mexican Citizen | <p>1 Count Conspiracy to Cultivate 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 846 and 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5)</p> <p>1 Count Cultivation of 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5)</p> <p>1 Count Possession of a Firearm During and in Relation to a Controlled Substance Offense; 18 USC §924(c)(1)</p> | <p>10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine</p> <p>10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine</p> <p>5 years to Life consecutive to any other sentence and up to a \$250K fine</p> |
| Ignacio Mendoza Guesar 07-0290-M | | Mexican Citizen | <p>1 Count Conspiracy to Cultivate 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 846 and 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5)</p> <p>1 Count Cultivation of 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5)</p> | <p>10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine</p> <p>10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine</p> |
| Adrian Quiroz Gutierrez 07-0290-M | | Mexican Citizen | <p>1 Count Conspiracy to Cultivate 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 846 and 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5)</p> <p>1 Count Cultivation of 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5)</p> | <p>10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine</p> <p>10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine</p> |
| Jose Tapia Varelas AKA Jose Manuel Mendosa Farias CR-07-1178-PHX-SRB | 21 | Mexican Citizen | <p>1 Count Conspiracy to Cultivate 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 846 and 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5)</p> <p>1 Count Cultivation of 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5)</p> <p>1 Count Possession of a Firearm During and in Relation to a Controlled Substance Offense; 18 USC §924(c)(1)</p> | <p>10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine</p> <p>10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine</p> <p>5 years to Life consecutive to any other sentence and up to a \$250K fine</p> |

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| Disidoro Tapia Lopez CR-07-1178-PHX-SRB | 26 | Mexican Citizen | <p>1 Count Conspiracy to Cultivate 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 846 and 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5)</p> <p>1 Count Cultivation of 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5)</p> | <p>10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine</p> <p>10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine</p> |
| Nicanor Arellano Villalobos CR-07-1178-PHX-SRB | 26 | Mexican Citizen | <p>1 Count Conspiracy to Cultivate 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 846 and 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5)</p> <p>1 Count Cultivation of 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5)</p> | <p>10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine</p> <p>10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine</p> |
| Julian Olivarez Gallardo CR-07-1178-PHX-SRB | 39 | Legal Permanent Resident Mexican Citizen | <p>1 Count Conspiracy to Cultivate 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 846 and 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5)</p> <p>1 Count Cultivation of 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5)</p> | <p>10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine</p> <p>10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine</p> |
| Jorge Alejandres Garcia CR-07-1178-PHX-SRB | 25 | Mexican Citizen | <p>1 Count Conspiracy to Cultivate 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 846 and 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5)</p> <p>1 Count Cultivation of 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5)</p> | <p>10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine</p> <p>10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine</p> |
| Juan Carlos Sandoval Barragan CR-07-1178-PHX-SRB | 22 | Mexican Citizen | <p>1 Count Conspiracy to Cultivate 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 846 and 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5)</p> <p>1 Count Cultivation of 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5)</p> | <p>10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine</p> <p>10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine</p> |

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| Jesus Tapia Lopez CR-07-1178-PHX-SRB | 51 | Mexican Citizen | 1 Count Conspiracy to Cultivate 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 846 and 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5) 1 Count Cultivation of 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5) | 10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine 10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine |
| Anastacio Aguilar Garcia CR-07-1178-PHX-SRB | 50 | Mexican Citizen | 1 Count Conspiracy to Cultivate 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 846 and 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5) 1 Count Cultivation of 1000 or more Marijuana Plants on National Forest Lands; 21 USC §§ 841(a)(1), (b)(1)(A)(vii) and (b)(5) | 10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine 10 years to Life and up to a \$4M fine |

Criminal complaints and indictments are simply the method by which a person is charged with criminal activity and raises no inference of guilt. An individual is presumed innocent until competent evidence is presented to a jury that establishes guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

The investigations preceding the complaints and indictments were conducted by the U.S. Forest Service, the Gila County Narcotics Task Force (comprised of the Gila County Sheriff's Office, the Gila County Attorney's Office and the Arizona Department of Public Safety), Phoenix Police Department and the Drug Enforcement Administration. The prosecution is being handled by Glenn McCormick, Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix.

CASE NUMBER: CR-07-1135-PHX-NVW (Cardenas, et al.)
CR-07-1136-PHX-EHC (Varelas, et al.)
CR-07-1178-PHX-SRB (Cuevas, et al.)
07-0290M (Guesar, et al.)

RELEASE NUMBER: 2007-228(Marijuana_Tonto)

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